



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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Craig L. Rieben (202) 343-5634

REGULATIONS PROPOSED FOR UPCOMING WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON

Duck hunting regulations proposed for the 1986-87 waterfowl season will continue restrictions established last season when breeding duck populations dropped to a 30-year low. Hunting regulations for most species of geese, brant, and swans will remain much the same as last year.

This year's fall flight of ducks is expected to number approximately 73 million, up from the fall flight index of 62 million in 1985. However, this is still the second lowest forecast on record. The annual index is a relative figure reflecting the general trend in duck populations rather than the exact number of ducks, Frank Dunkle, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said.

"While the modest increase in the fall flight figures is encouraging, restrictions should be maintained to protect the modest gain made in some duck species over last year," Dunkle said. "We still must be concerned about the low populations of one of America's most cherished wildlife resources."

The proposed frameworks lead to development of final frameworks from which states will select their individual seasons. Proposed duck season framework dates for the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways are October 4, 1986, through January 18, 1987. The dates for the Pacific Flyway are October 4, 1986, through January 11, 1987. The conventional daily bag limit will be four ducks in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways and five ducks in the Pacific Flyway. Shooting hours again will be from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Owing to low populations, continued restrictions are proposed for mallards and pintails. In areas opting for the point system, it is proposed that black ducks and hen mallards be 100 point birds. Pintails and drake mallards will remain 35 point birds as was the case last year. It is proposed that seasons on canvasbacks be closed in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways. Eastern breeding populations of canvasbacks fell below the 360,000 breeding bird level identified in guidelines established for hunting regulations.

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While an increase in duck populations is predicted in all four flyways this year, many prime wetland areas in parts of the Canadian provinces such as northern Saskatchewan and southern Alberta have not yet recovered from drought conditions experienced during the last few years. In general, habitat conditions improved in the north-central United States and in Manitoba. Spring weather conditions in Alaska also were more favorable for nesting ducks this year. As a result, duck flights from these particular areas are expected to be higher than last year.

Other details of the proposed regulations were published in the August 15, 1986, Federal Register. Hunters are urged to check final State regulations for their local areas carefully prior to going afield. The final set of regulations is expected to be published in mid-September and State wildlife agencies can be contacted for information on the final regulations.

Early duck seasons, such as September teal seasons, were established earlier this year and are not affected by the proposed regulations.

Public comments on the proposals are requested and should be addressed to the Director (MBMO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Matomic Building Room 536, Washington, DC 20240. Because of the need to complete regulations prior to the opening of the waterfowl hunting season, public comments must be received by August 25, 1986.